

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SANA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 071

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANA 0130

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, YE

SUBJECT: IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER TO VISIT SANA

1. IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ABAS ALI KHALATBARI WILL BE VISITING YEMEN ON A THREE-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT BEGINNING ON OR ABOUT JANUARY 15. FOREIGN MINISTER AL-ASNAJ TOLD ME ON JANUARY 9 THAT THE VISIT HAS BEEN SCHEDULED FOR ATPONG TIME AND REPRESENTS A YEMENI EFFORT TO ESTABLISH CLOSER TIES WITH IRAN. AL-ASNAJ CONTINUED THAT THERE ARE NO YEMENI EXPECTATIONS FOR DIRECT IRANIAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE BUT HE HOPED THAT THE IRANIANS WOULD PROCEED TO IMPLEMENT EARLIER AGREEMENTS TO BUILD A MILITARY AIRPORT IN SANA AS WELL AS CONSTRUCT A HOUSING PROJECT FOR OFFICERS.

2. AL-ASNAJ SAID THAT THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN INFORMED OF THE VISIT AND ADDED THAT HE IS CERTAIN THEY ARE PLEASED TO SEE GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN YEMEN AND IRAN AS PART OF AN OVER-ALL EFFORT TO BRING ABOUT COOPERATION MODERATE STATES IN THE REGION. COMMENT. THE YEMENIS HAVE BEEN TRYING FOR A LONG
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TIME TO INTEREST IRAN IN YEMEN BOTH IN THE HOPE OF OBTAINING FURTHER MATERIAL ASSISTANCE AS WELL AS IN AN EFFORT TO PLAY A GREATER REGIONAL ROLE. IN ANY CASE, VISIT TAKES US AND OTHERS HERE BY SURPRISE. YEMENIS SEEM SURPRISED TOO. AT THE OUTSET OF MY MEETING, ASNAJ ABRUPTLY ASKED ME WHAT I THOUGHT OF THE EVENT. HE APPEARED TO BE A LITTLE CONCERNED THAT

THE SAUDIS WOULD MISREAD THE EVENT. BEYOND THAT, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE YEMENIS ARE PLEASED. AT A TIME WHEN YEMEN HAS BEEN EXCLUDED FROM A CONFERENCE IN RIYADH FOR FRONT LINE AND PENINSULAR STATES--A CONFERENCE THE AMBITIOUS HAMDI WANTED VERY MUCH TO ATTEND, LIKE THE GULF SECURITY CONFERENCE IN MASQAT--THE VISIT OF A HIGH RANKING OFFICIAL FROM THE STRONGEST MILITARY STATE IN THE REGION OFFERS GOOD CONSULATION. WHATEVER THE REALITY, HAMDI WANTS TO APPEAR INDEPENDENT, WANTS TO APPEAR TO BE PLAYING A BROADER ROLE. TH YEMENIS OBVIOUSLY ALSO HOPE FOR MORE SUCCESS THAN IN THE PAST IN PERSUADING THE IRANIANS TO ACT ON THEIR AID PROMISES. HAMDI, AFTER ALL, AS HE HAS NOTED TO ME, WAS THE FIRST (AND ONLY) ARAB LEADER TO VISIT DHOFAR AND THUS FIVE A SPECIAL KIND OF BLESSING TO THE IRANIAN FORCE THERE. HE DID THIS EVENQLHOUGH HIS SEPARATED YEMENI BRETHEN IN ADEN WERE VERY UNHAPPY WITH THE VISIT. WHAT IS NOT SO CLEAR TO US IS WHY KHALATBARI WANTS TO COME HERE. COULD THE IRANIANS WANT LANDING RIGHTS OR SHIP VISITS IN THE BAB ALMANDEB REGION? IS THIS AN ATTEMPT TO APPROACH PDRY AT A TIME WHEN THE SAUDIS ARE MONOPOLIZING THE SOUTH YEMENI DIPLOMATIC STAGE EVEN THOUGH IRANIAN FORCE CONTRIBUTED SIGNALLY TO ADEN'S TRACTABILITY? PERHPAS, WITH THE PRESENT VEXATION IN THERAN WITH THE SAUDIS TH KHALATBARI, VISIT IS RPT IS IN SOME WAY CALCULATED TO BE AN AFFRONT TO THE SAUDIS, TO MOVE INTO THE SAUDIS' BACK YARD. WE DEFER TO EMBASSY TEHRAN FOR AN EXPLANATION OF THIS UNEXPECTED AND RATHER INTERESTING IRANIAN EXCURSION TO THE FARTHEST ARABIA. SCOTES
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